



January 11, 2001

Mr. Francisco J. Martinez  
Cameron County  
974 East Harrison Street  
Brownsville, Texas 78520

OR2001-0128

Dear Mr. Martinez:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act, chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 143115.

The Cameron County District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney") received a request for records, reports, and other information pertaining to the possible crimes or criminal actions of a named individual. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.108, 552.117, and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the information you submitted.<sup>1</sup>

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." For information to be protected from public disclosure by the common law right of privacy under section 552.101, the information must meet the criteria set out in *Industrial Foundation v. Texas Industrial Accident Board*, 540 S.W.2d 668 (Tex. 1976), *cert. denied*, 430 U.S. 931 (1977). In *Industrial Foundation*, the Texas Supreme Court stated that information is excepted from disclosure if (1) the information contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts the release of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person and (2) the information is not of legitimate concern to the public. 540 S.W.2d at 685. Where an individual's criminal history information has been compiled by a governmental entity, the

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<sup>1</sup>This letter ruling assumes that the representative samples of information you submitted are truly representative of the responsive information as a whole. This ruling neither reaches nor authorizes the district attorney to withhold any requested information that is substantially different from the submitted information. See Gov't Code § 552.301(e)(1)(D); Open Records Decision Nos. 499 at 6 (1988), 497 at 4 (1988).

information takes on a character that implicates the individual's right to privacy. *See United States Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Comm. for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749 (1989). In this instance, the requestor asks for unspecified reports, records, and other information concerning possible crimes or criminal actions of a certain individual. Since the requestor is, in essence, asking the district attorney to compile this individual's criminal history, we believe that the individual's right to privacy has been implicated by the request. Thus, we conclude that you must withhold the requested information under common law privacy as encompassed by section 552.101 of the Government Code. Because we are able to make a determination under section 552.101, we do not address your other exceptions to disclosure.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

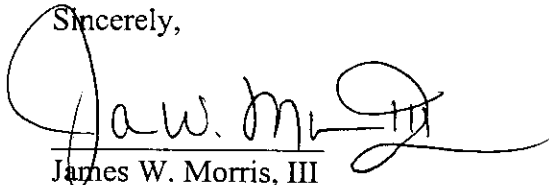
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the General Services Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J.W. Morris, III", with a large, stylized initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

James W. Morris, III  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JWM/er

Ref: ID# 143115

Encl: Submitted documents

cc: Mr. William A. Faulk, Jr.  
Cameron County Republican Party  
1025 South 16<sup>th</sup> Street  
Harlingen, Texas 78550  
(w/o enclosures)